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SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS OMBUDSMAN OUTLINES FIVE-YEAR
STRATEGIC PLAN OF ACTION AND PRIORITIES

Classified By: Amb. James Derham for reasons 1.4(b,d).

¶1. (U) Human Rights Ombudsman Sergio Morales highlighted his accomplishments during his first term in office and presented his strategic plan of action and priorities for the next five years to the international donor community at a recent forum. He thanked the community for its support and announced that during his second term he will better coordinate international support to more effectively carry out his mandate.

¶2. (U) Morales outlined five strategic areas of focus, including institutional strengthening and development, and public education and sensitization in human rights. The end goal, he said, is to construct a culture of respect for the rule of law. He proposed increasing the presence of the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman (PDH) nationwide by doubling the number of regional offices and elevating the role of PDH in educating the public. Currently, PDH has 23 offices and 700 employees nationwide.

¶3. (U) Deputy Human Rights Ombudsman Maria Eugenia Morales affirmed that PDH is committed to creating a national register of kidnappings and addressing the theme of victimization as a top priority. She stressed the need to sensitize all levels of the government hierarchy, including the most senior levels, to avoid "double victimization" -- first as the victim of a human rights abuse and secondly as the victim of the bureaucracy when authorities claim lack of knowledge and fail to take action.

¶4. (U) PDH has budgeted USD 15 million in its 2008 operating plan to implement its five areas of focus. The GOG has committed USD 10 million while international donors have pledged USD 1 million, leaving a gap of USD 4 million.

¶5. (C) Comment: While the PDH five-year strategic plan of action addresses areas of real need, the extent to which it will deliver results is questionable. The plan appears more to be about extending Morales' bureaucratic empire than about tackling difficult human rights challenges. With family connections to the ownership of newspaper "Prensa Libre" (Guatemala's most important daily), Morales plays to the media, draws public attention, and enjoys good media coverage despite a performance that is relatively short on real achievements that advance human rights in Guatemala.
Derham